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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

October 6, 1961

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Gromyko Talks - Southeast Asia

We are very concerned at the slow progress of the settlement on Laos. The President felt that he had reached understanding in principle with Chairman Khrushchev but there seems to be difficulty in agreeing on the concrete terms. In the meanwhile the DRV is using the delay to infiltrate forces through southern Laos into South Viet Nam. We are very disturbed by these developments. If we cannot translate into concrete terms our agreement on principles for a settlement in Laos, it augurs poorly for a settlement with respect to Berlin.

The President was serious in his intent to achieve a settlement in Laos and has given Ambassador Harriman a wide measure of discretion to work to this end. He had hoped that by bilateral talks between Ambassador Harriman and Pushkin progress in the conference could be expedited. However, it did not seem that Pushkin had similarly wide discretion and they had not made much progress. The President called Ambassador Harriman back and discussed the matter yesterday with him. Ambassador Harriman will be back in Geneva on Monday and will get in touch with Pushkin. The President hopes that Pushkin will then have instructions that will enable them to resolve the outstanding questions at Geneva.

The President also hopes that the Soviets will exercise their influence with the Pathet Lao and Souvanna Phouma so that there can be an agreement between the parties in Laos on the questions that have to be decided there. We have been exercising our influence with Phoumi and Prince Boun Oum and we are convinced that they are prepared to negotiate in good faith at the talks between the "three princes" that opened today at Ban Hin Heup. If Souvanna Phouma and the Pathet Lao are in a similar mood, an agreement there should also shortly be possible.

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BY MEB NARS, DATE 10/23/78

However, the President desires that Foreign Minister Gromyko understand that any settlement must be a true compromise. Our willingness to reach an agreement should not be interpreted by the Soviet Union as a willingness to surrender Laos or South Viet Nam to communist control. We feel that Laos can and should be a truly neutral area and that there must be a cessation of the increasingly open attacks against South Viet Nam by the DRV. We are well aware that the Soviet aircraft have increased their airlift to Tchepone and that this airlift is evidently being used to support the DRV infiltration into South Viet Nam. Both the Soviets and the DRV should understand that we are deeply committed to South Viet Nam and cannot and will not accept its destruction.

With respect to Laos there are a number of essential points upon which we must and will continue to insist. We consider our position on these as representing reasonable compromise and had expected that if the Soviets desired an agreement these points would also be acceptable to the Soviet Union.

These points are:

(1) It is essential that there be satisfactory and workable agreement on the demobilization and reintegration of military forces in Laos. There must be an armed force loyal to the new government and it is not possible to accept that the Pathet Lao should be permitted to retain a private army. The agreement on this must be largely worked out by the Lao themselves but it is important that we and the Soviets agree on the principle. We both must see that such an agreement is worked out and adhered to.

(2) If there is to be a truly neutral government in Laos, it must be well balanced with a center including moderates from elsewhere in Laos than Xieng Khouang. We hope the Soviets will use their influence with Souvanna Phouma and the Pathet Lao to come up with a really balanced government which could produce a neutral Laos and live up to its undertakings in that respect.

(3) The ICC in Laos must be able to operate effectively and observe that the agreement is being carried out in good faith. This is easy enough with respect to the Americans but is much more difficult with respect to the Viet Minh. We must insist on an ICC that is able to move freely around the country as well as establish fixed teams, especially on the routes for present DRV infiltration into South Viet Nam.

(4) We are interested in Pushkin's remarks to Harriman that the Soviet Union would be willing to accept responsibility for the faithful carrying out of any agreement by the "socialist states". Ambassador Harriman has been authorized to explore with Pushkin more fully exactly how this can be accomplished.

Don Rusk